

# It's Time to Change Age-Old Interview Questions

The talent crunch is getting acute every day for companies, and the old notion of conducting an interview where the implicit question to the candidate is "Tell us why we should care about you" has gone to the gutters, where such attitudes belong. Candidates with the extra qualities above technical skills and certifications that set them apart from the crowd do not care about such attitudes. They take jobs with arrogant companies only as stopgap measures and leave at the earliest opportunity. If you truly want to find who is killing your company, look to the arrogant interviewer with the "holier than thou" attitude who tries to convey to job interview candidates that he is doing a favor to them.

A company is only as strong as its people are and it can grow only as far as its staff is willing to take it. An oft quoted adage by George Dariot is that it's better to back an A team with a B plan than an A plan with a B team. This adage is lost on arrogant interviewers. And the arrogance shows every day to candidates who are learned and well-versed in the art of interviewing and know full-well the implicit nature of questions.

## It's time to question the worth of your interview questions

Unless you are well aware of the questions that you have on your age-old interview questions' list, chances are that you have quite a big number of arrogant questions that you think are part of normal interviews. Well they were normal before globalization and before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but they are not normal anymore.

Ask your interviewers about the implicit indications hidden in regular questions like, "why do you think you are a good fit for our company? What do you feel about your last job? How do you think you can add value to the processes here? What do you think of work ethics? What are your weaknesses? Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera" and you'd find that all such questions carry the same recurring theme "tell us why we should care."

Well, it's time to wake up and start caring, because you need the best in order to survive in a world where local neighborhood stores face global competition. And when it comes to building a legal department and recruiting leaders and support staff of your in-house legal team, unless you manage to land the best, you are putting yourself in trouble. "Tell us about your strengths and weaknesses" is no question to ask a lawyer. Don't open your relationship by trying to belittle someone to whom you might need to expose your insides tomorrow. It's time to rethink interviews.

**Ask practical questions in an interview and don't fish for what can be easily learned in other manners or from documents already received**

When making for in-house counsel and conducting an interview, it's better for you to avoid harping on "skill" and "intention" questions. Rather, you should use most of the precious time to sell your company once you have found a good candidate.

The simple fact that a lawyer is across the interview table does not mean he/she's sold on your company; you need to do the selling right on the interview table. And you need to win good candidates over.

So, today, the most important question to ask a candidate is not "Why should we care?" but "whether you would take the job if it comes your way." What you really need to understand is whether the candidate is just shopping for jobs or genuinely interested in your company. Once you determine he/she may join, do your job to recruit that person.

So, why are we asking interviewers to take this apparently odd approach that is quite divergent from standard age-old interview patterns? The answer is that a lawyer is a candidate who can make or break your company. You want the best, and you want people with high emotional intelligence – that is what you should determine at the interview, and then sell the job.

Most of the things about skill and other things that standard interviews consist of are really superfluous in the case of a lawyer: if he doesn't know the job, he can learn and adapt. Every lawyer comes to the profession ready for situations where they have to study and understand entirely new applications of laws overnight and then execute the application the next morning. But the only people who can do that successfully, and can keep contributing to the reputation of the company are people with high emotional intelligence, people who maintain a core set of values, and people whom you don't belittle.

### **Interview questions that truly matter today**

So, again, the real implicit question to tailor questions around in an interview is "whether a candidate would take the job or not." Other considerations either work out by themselves, or are already known before the interview – after all, that is the job of HR.

Rather than asking, "Why do you think you are a good fit to this company" it is much better to ask "Why do you think our company has the potential to succeed?" Words matter. And it matters how you pose certain questions. It is much better for an interviewer to ask practical questions like "What other companies are you currently considering working at?" instead of "How do you feel about your last employer?"

Being able to hire emotionally intelligent employees provides huge competitive advantages to in-house legal departments. Emotionally intelligent people don't belittle their peers; they don't scream at juniors, but they build genuine relationships within the company and change work culture for the better. The

ability to listen and to tell the truth in a constructive manner are qualities of emotionally intelligent people, and they attract the best to work for the company. To win the war for talent, first appoint recruiters who have high emotional intelligence, and then build the in-house legal team that can be the envy of others.

Ref:

Adele B. Lynn, *The EQ Interview: Finding Employees with High Emotional Intelligence* (New York: AMACOM, 2008)